

# Turkish government escalates attack on democratic rights amid explosive social conditions

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On Sunday, the annual Pride March in Beyo?lu, Istanbul, attended by thousands of people, was violently attacked by police. In Istanbul, 371 people were detained, including AFP photojournalist Bülent K?l?ç, along with dozens more in other cities, including Izmir and Ankara. According to news reports and statements by lawyers, those detained were released in the following hours.

The Istanbul Governor's Office closed some roads to traffic on Sunday morning in Beyo?lu, where Taksim Square is located, and deployed a large number of police forces in the area ahead of the peaceful march, citing "calls for unauthorized meetings, demonstrations and similar activities on social media." During the day, the police relentlessly attacked those who wanted to gather, while marches and protests took place on various streets despite the crackdown.

Last week, the district governorships of Beyo?lu and Kad?köy announced a one-week ban on "LGBTI+ Pride Week" events. In the Kad?köy District Governorship's statement, the arbitrary ban was based on Article 17 of Law No. 2911 on Meetings and Demonstrations, hypocritically citing "the protection of peace, security and well-being and the prevention of crime."

In fact, this law effectively abolishes the Constitutional article stating that "Everyone has the right to organize unarmed and nonviolent meetings and demonstrations without prior permission." This arbitrary police attack, ordered by President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an's government, is one of the largest detention operations in recent years and an obvious onslaught on basic democratic rights.

The main target of the Erdo?an government's increased police state repression and authoritarianism is the working class, which is beginning to mobilize together with its international class brothers and sisters against

skyrocketing costs of living and growing attacks on social conditions.

Inflation—triggered by the massive printing of money by central banks around the world, further enriching the super-rich and exacerbated by the NATO war against Russia in Ukraine—has pushed the cost of living in Turkey to unprecedented levels. According to a survey conducted in March, 90 percent of the population lives below the poverty line. Under these explosive social conditions, the strike and protest movement of various sections of the working class, especially health workers, is developing.

Faced with ever-increasing inflation and poverty and growing social opposition, the government is targeting basic democratic rights, promoting religious reaction, chauvinism and militarism to suppress the working class.

The anti-democratic state crackdown on Kurdish politicians and the media escalated after Erdogan announced in late May a new military operation against the US-backed Kurdish nationalist People's Protection Units (YPG) in Syria.

Members of the Kurdish nationalist People's Democratic Party (HDP), a legal pro-NATO and pro-European Union party with more than 5 million votes, which the government accuses of being an extension of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and YPG, are detained or arrested on charges of being "members of a terrorist group" without any evidence. Another 38 politicians were detained in Adana yesterday, including HDP Provincial Co-chairs Helin Kaya and Mehmet Karak?? and Seyhan Municipality Deputy Mayor Funda Buyruk.

Also this month, 20 journalists from the Kurdish press were detained on similar allegations and 16 of them were arrested. In this attack on press freedom, journalists were sent to jail for news they reported.

The attack on press freedom is accompanied by the government's planned amendment to the press law, which has been postponed in the face of widespread public opposition. The amendment envisages a prison sentence of one to three years for "anyone who publicly disseminates untrue information about the country's internal and external security, public order and public health with the intention of creating anxiety, fear or panic among the public in a manner likely to disrupt public peace."

In Turkey, for example, where the official annual inflation rate announced by the government is over 70 percent, according to this amendment it will be a criminal offense to disseminate information based on a study by ENAG, an independent research agency, that the real annual inflation rate is 160 percent. Under the pretext of "internal and external security" and "disturbing public peace," exposing the reactionary character of the government's war policies or state repression against workers' struggles could be criminalized.

Moreover, the amendment also places under threat scientists and health care workers who directly provide information on the COVID-19 pandemic in the press or on social media, under conditions where the government has stopped releasing all official data on the COVID-19 pandemic since June 12. Scientists and public health advocates who warn the population against the government's false claim that "the pandemic is over," or those who calculate the excess death toll and expose the government's concealment of the true death toll from the pandemic, could become targets.

These reactionary attacks on democratic rights are by no means confined to Turkey. All over the world the escalation of the war by the US-led NATO powers against Russia in Ukraine is accompanied by the elimination of basic democratic rights and the promotion of the far-right forces at home.

In the US, five unelected members of the Supreme Court have decided to strip hundreds of millions of Americans of the right to abortion. In France, an unelected administrative court has banned Muslim women from wearing religious bathing suits. This attack on the rights of the immigrant population is accompanied by the elimination of the right to asylum. Britain attempts to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda. In Spain at least 37 asylum seekers were massacred by security forces trying to cross the Spanish-Moroccan border.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* explained in its recent Perspective column "Imperialist war and the attack on

democratic rights": "The escalation of the US-NATO war against Russia and the massive attack on democratic rights—epitomized in the US Supreme Court decision abolishing the right to an abortion—are two sides of the same process."

And: "The Democratic Party and Biden administration have facilitated the Supreme Court's attack on democratic rights with constant efforts to appeal to and appease the far right."

The same fundamental class issues are posed in Turkey. As a matter of fact there is no faction within the Turkish or Kurdish bourgeoisie that isn't deeply tied to imperialism, or defends basic democratic rights. Neither the Erdoğan government nor the bourgeois opposition, including the HDP and its pseudo-left supporters, are opposed to the imperialist war that is seeking to abolish democratic rights. The pro-NATO and pro-EU political establishment as a whole is hostile to the basic social and democratic rights of the working class and the oppressed masses.

As the Turkish working class begins to take action as part of the international movement of strikes and protests, it is increasingly coming into open conflict not only with the corporations and pro-capitalist unions, but with the entire political establishment, including the various pseudo-left organizations. In this fight, the struggle to defend social and democratic rights and the struggle against imperialist war must be connected on the basis of an international socialist program. This is the perspective of the International Committee of the Fourth International and its followers in Turkey, the Socialist Equality Group.



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